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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: eradicating poverty, including through the empowerment of women throughout their life cycle in a globalizing world

Statement submitted by Mother's Union, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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STATEMENT OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The Mothers' Union is an Anglican voluntary organisation promoting the wellbeing of families throughout the world. Our one million members world wide, the majority of whom are women, are actively engaged in a wide variety of initiatives within their own communities. In particular, our *Family*

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Life and *Literacy and Development* programmes allow for a dynamic process of cradle to grave empowerment of women by women. We have long recognised the key role women play within families and communities, together with the disproportionate burden of poverty carried by women, and identify their empowerment as vital for the building of social capital and for the eradication of poverty. More crucially, women's empowerment is a basic human right. We therefore welcome the opportunity provided by the 46th CSW to address the issue of poverty eradication through women's empowerment, and to submit our recommendations.

Guiding principles

We believe that poverty eradication cannot be fully achieved without the holistic empowerment of women: through giving power to women; enabling women to empower themselves and one another; and nurturing women's sense of place and identity. In keeping with the concept of 'human poverty'[1], we assert that empowerment must take place in not only economic terms but also social, political and personal spheres. The areas in which empowerment is needed varies from woman to woman and differs throughout the life cycle. Empowerment strategies must be sensitive to this, and be responsive to a wide variety of needs.

The globalization phenomenon increases the onus on power-holding states to take responsibility for empowering others, for the benefit of all. We challenge these governments to meet aid targets through monitored, gender-sensitive programmes and model good practice through empowering women (e.g. through implementing the Optional Protocol to CEDAW). Moreover, we note the inequality of access to the opportunities of the globalizing world between rich and poor states. We call for genuine dialogue to identify strategies, which are sensitive to the needs of the South, to redress the consequent disparity in development rates.

[1] As defined by the Human Development Report (1997), United Nations.

Recommendations:

- **Education & training**

Each additional education level a woman attains yields a corresponding reduction in fertility rates and increase in productivity. However, where families are required to pay for children's education at the point of delivery, evidence shows that boys are often educated in preference to girls. In addition, we note the inverse relationship between indebtedness and girls' enrolment in secondary school.

The Mothers' Union calls for a redoubling of effort by governments to achieve the IDT of gender gap closure in primary and secondary education by 2005. Governments must invest in girls' education at every level, including prioritising the provision of universal primary and secondary education, free at the point of delivery. We call for 100% debt cancellation, urging actors and states to honour commitments already made, and to release PRSP money where appropriate use (i.e.: focusing on health or education) can be guaranteed.

- **Representation & status**

We urge state parties to recommit to the target agreed at Beijing that at least 30% of decision-making positions be filled by women, through its adoption as an IDT for 2015. There is a lack of and pressing need for women's voices to be heard at every level in the economy, society and polity. Strategies must be developed to remedy this through increasing women's capacity to govern and make decisions, beginning with widespread implementation of literacy programmes targeting women.

Women must be fully consulted by governments in the derivation of socio-economic policies and participate in genuine dialogue on and the implementation of development strategies. As women and children often suffer disproportionately in conflict situations, women should be involved in peace-making and conflict resolution processes at every level.

Those in positions of authority and influence have a responsibility to initiate changes in attitudes towards women. Government, faith and traditional leaders must work together to identify, challenge and overcome harmful, disempowering practices and attitudes, including those regarding:

- women's economic activity, remuneration, employment and control of money;
- men's active participation in family/caring roles;
- widow's property and inheritance rights;
- violence against women.

The role of spiritual and personal empowerment of women in poverty eradication must not be overlooked. Faith groups should encourage women to take responsibility for their own spirituality. Strategies must be developed by communities for encouraging a culture of mutual affirmation amongst women.

- **Income**

Research shows where women control family income, more is spent on food and children's education, yielding verifiable health benefits and the possibility of breaking the cycle of poverty and female disempowerment through educating girls. That women should have access to independent incomes and be given greater responsibility over finances at all levels of the economy is therefore imperative.

In addition to the removal of educational and cultural barriers to women's achievement of independent incomes, we seek wider use of and investment in grass-roots participative economic empowerment programmes for women, including the development of numeracy and business management skills.

With regard to employment, family welfare is paramount. Governments have a responsibility to introduce and implement legislation ensuring all men and women have access to the minimum level of income necessary to maintain health and wellbeing of children[2]. Where necessary employment laws should be revised to ensure adequate rights and protection for all workers, including informal sector, casual and home workers (of which a significant proportion are women). Governments should work with business and worker representatives towards the provision of widespread quality child-care and family-friendly work practices.

- **Access to resources**

We accept that access to financial resources in addition to education, training and equal opportunities increases productivity, which in turn reduces poverty.

Micro-credit schemes are theoretically invaluable for enabling women to access resources required to become self-sufficient. In practice, however, lending under existing systems means that loan repayment often remains impossible, turning poor people into debtors. The Mothers' Union calls for collaborative research into micro-credit with a view to establishing smaller, women- and family-friendly schemes.

Strategies for channelling poverty reduction funds to grass roots level should be developed for use in local workable initiatives which can have a real impact on poverty: increasing funding to governments or

[2] See United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

agencies is insufficient in itself. Such strategies should include mechanisms for greater accountability and transparency in the use of such funds.

"There are no 'child-neutral' macro-economic and fiscal policies."[3] This is equally true for women. We therefore press for gender and child mainstreaming with respect to national economic policy, and support UNIFEM's call for governments to implement gender responsive budget analysis by 2015. In addition, the Mothers' Union calls for capacity building to enable women to engage in the development of PRSPs, and gender mainstreaming of these programmes, monitored through gender analysis.

We welcome the empowerment brought by the new technologies, notably in terms of access to information, markets and communication. Such resources are key for women who typically enjoy less travel mobility, and whose consultation and involvement in future innovation we would therefore urge. We also acknowledge that these technologies are not currently universally accessible, and urge member states to collaborate in developing strategies to prevent this inequality from becoming a source of further marginalisation and disempowerment of the poorest.

- **Health**

The Mothers' Union subscribes to a holistic approach to healthcare and nutrition, including the employment of a combination of prevention and education strategies, drugs and vaccines, and widespread training in basic care schemes. Despite the recent changes in interpretation of intellectual property legislation, drugs remain inaccessible to the poorest: Primary Health Care and palliative programmes must therefore be emphasised.

[3] James D Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, 26th February 2001

We welcome the Global Health Fund as potentially key in redressing international disparities in healthcare. However, exacerbation of intra-state inequality must be guarded against through investing in infrastructure to ensure the benefits of the fund reach the poorest.

Given considerations including the IDT to reduce maternal mortality by 2015, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the correlation of poverty with both early motherhood and high birth rates, it is paramount that all women should be empowered to control their own fertility. Governments and NGOs should work together with faith and community leaders in the promotion of this right, including through the provision of relevant education and resources for women, and the prevention of child marriage and sexual abuse.

Concluding remarks

The Mothers' Union supports the ongoing work towards the International Development Targets, but is concerned that the current rate of progress implies these are unlikely to be achieved. We therefore call for renewed commitment to the IDTs.

Both the lack of acknowledgement and extent of the feminisation of poverty[4] are of grave concern. We challenge member states of the UN to resolve to eradicate this disparity of wealth between the genders by 2015.

[4] Women are 70% of the world's poor.